

**PUTAH CREEK  
AND  
THE BAY DELTA**

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**STATEMENT BY CHRIS HORSLEY BEFORE  
THE STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD  
JUNE 14, 1994**

Forty-six years ago, the Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation submitted his report on the proposed Solano County project to the Secretary of Interior in which he stated that, "Putah Creek, a local tributary of the Sacramento River is now wasting practically all of its 375,000 acre-feet of average annual run-off into the ocean---" Nine days later the Secretary approved and adopted the report which then lead to the authorization of the project that November. The earliest mention I have found of a connection between the Sacramento and Putah Creek is in De Pue's "The Illustrated History of Yolo County, California, 1879." A United States Army exploration team lead by a Major Stephen Cooper camped on the banks of the Rio des los Putos in October of 1846. One of that party, Lieutenant Edwin Bryant wrote then in his diary about " Puto Creek, a tributary of the Sacramento ". As early as 1854, the construction of levees was begun at the town of Washington, now West Sacramento, to contain the overflow of the Sacramento as well as the American River. De Pue quotes news articles from 1878 that report "The Sacramento River kept rising until about the 22nd (Feb) when the levee began to give way in many places,

thus releasing the stream by side escapes to the tules in Yolo County. --- In conclusion, we would add that there were no levees along the river prior to 1854 to obstruct the passage of its surplus water back into the great reservoir called tule or swamp land." Indeed, the great 18,000 acre rancho of Jerome Davis that extended from West Sacramento to Davis, at the lower reaches of Putah Creek, was called "Laguna de Santos Calle".

The fresh waters of Putah Creek once combined with the flows of other Central Valley rivers to stem the salt laden tides of the San Francisco Bay and was recognized by Mr. Kerr, Planning Engineer of the Bureau of Reclamation when he testified before a Subcommittee of the United States House of Representatives in 1948. He said, "The state plan for the Central Valley, which is practically what the Bureau is following, included a dam at the Monticello site as a part of the State plan for a comprehensive Central Valley project. That reservoir, however, was only proposed to have a capacity of 130,000 acre-feet. It has always been our idea that we should irrigate as much land as we can from the tributaries and then the rest of it from the Sacramento River in that area. It is all tied together. The one reason for the large reservoir at Monticello is its possibilities for use to hold over the water not only for the area we are speaking of, but for a good many years to come, for other areas to which the water could be turned down. We could turn water out of the Monticello Reservoir, for instance, down here and help to hold back the ocean salinity. One of the biggest problems of the whole delta area is to hold back the

sea water which wants to come in when the flows in the streams get low in the summer. It comes in and brings salt water almost as far as Sacramento in a very dry year. In order to keep that salt back, we have to let down fresh water. Shasta Reservoir is doing most of that job at the present time, but if we had right now a large reservoir here at Monticello, we could use that also to hold back salt water. In other words, it could do one of the functions of the Central Valley project structure which is done now by Shasta Reservoir."

The siren song of the Solano water interests perpetuate the myth of a creek that flows nowhere, yet Putah Creek was a river of salmon and steelhead, a river that created the northern reaches of the Bay Delta itself. Grizzley bears were abundant near the river's banks. The pioneer John Wolfskill, creator of the Mexican land grant Rancho Rio des los Putos, killed several Grizzly bears during an hour and a half horse ride near his Putah Creek home in the 1840's. We will not bring back the bears but we can restore their favorite food, the salmon.

A shared burden is a lighter burden, and so when a problem becomes a burden it is incumbent upon all those who created the problem to carry the load. It is now time for the Solano Project to come out of the shadows and cease being the forgotten fixture of the CVP. How can it be reasonable - how can it be beneficial to the public interest to capture the rainfall during a drought, so precious to the watershed, so vital to the natural system, and then let most of it evaporate

from a lake? I believe it is far more reasonable to manage the Project in a truly conjunctive manner and keep the aquifer surrounding the creek fully recharged as well as the aquifer beneath the service area of the Project. By restoring flows below the dam, environmental concerns would vanish, the creekside aquifer would fill and the Delta would begin to heal. Solano need not lose any effective Project yield for it can begin to pump the high water table beneath its service area. A 1988 hydrologic report commissioned by the Solano Irrigation District concluded, "To augment supplies and avoid water logging of soils in the Putah Fan area, from 25,000 to 30,000 acre-feet of water should be pumped annually from this basin." A table in this same report gave an annual average of only 5,500 acre-feet pumped by the district from 1964 to 1987. Solano has water, a great deal of water with which to fulfill its obligations set by the Board and demanded by vested prior rights holders. Is it reasonable to allow Solano to use this water to expand when its debt goes unpaid for so long? The cities of Solano are in no danger of running short of water. Three quarters of delivered Solano Project water go to enrich a handful of growers - growers who own land over an under utilized aquifer built at the expense of the watershed. I call upon you to look past the old alliances and polished public relations. We must not let the few spirit away this vital and crucial public resource of California.